

**We Claim:**

1. A method for use with an Internet-based, business-to-business web site, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) aggregating product information from each of a plurality of vendors into a

5 common display format;

(b) in response to receiving identification information from an Internet-enabled computing device, the web site sending the computing device a graphical user interface showing a list of departments or product categories for which a buyer is authorized to make purchases;

10 (c) upon receipt of a selection of a product category or department from the computing device, the web site sending the computing device a list of vendors that have authorized products corresponding to the selected department or category; and

(d) upon receipt of a selection of a vendor, the web site sending the computing device that vendor's list of approved products corresponding to the selected department 15 or category.

2. The method of claim 1 further including the steps of:

(e) the computing device receiving an order for one or more approved products;

and

5 (f) the web site receiving the order from the computing device;

wherein the order specifies a plurality of order parameters including the identity of the product and the quantity desired.

3. The method of claim 2 further including the step of the web site forwarding the order to the selected vendor for fulfillment.

4. The method of claim 3 further including the step of the web site receiving order tracking information pertaining to a tracking of shipment of the order from the vendor to the buyer.

5. The method of claim 3 further including the steps of providing each of a plurality of buyers with one or more Internet-enabled computing devices, and associating each of a plurality of buyers with a corresponding privilege level.

6. The method of claim 5 further including the step of the web site providing a first privilege level which allows the buyer to view the identities and descriptions of approved vendor products.

7. The method of claim 6 further including the step of the web site providing a second privilege level which allows the buyer to view identities and descriptions as well as price information.

8. The method of claim 7 further including the step of the web site providing a third privilege level which allows the buyer to view the orders and purchases of other buyers in the same product category or department.

9. The method of claim 8 further including the step of the web site providing a fourth privilege level which allows the buyer to view all orders and purchases made by all buyers at a given location or facility.

10. The method of claim 9 further including the step of the web site providing a fifth privilege level which allows the buyer to view all purchases made by all buyers at all facilities of a given buyer company.

11. The method of claim 5 further including the step of the web site providing a super-administrative privilege level which allows an administrator to implement at least one of acquisition, aggregation, analysis, and examination of data pertaining to a plurality of buyer and/or vendor transactions.

12. The method of claim 5 further including the step of the web site assigning every buyer order a unique order number that includes information identifying the year, month, day, and hour that the order was placed.

13. The method of claim 12 further including the steps of assigning a first incoming buyer order received during a particular year, month, day, and hour, a first sequence number, and the second incoming buyer order received during this particular year, month, day and hour, a second sequence number, wherein the first and second incoming buyer orders could, but need not, be from the same buyer.

14. The method of claim 12 further including the web site associating each order with a status byte indicative of whether the order is pending, cancelled, shipped full, shipped partial, back ordered, received full, received partial, refused full, or refused partial.

15. The method of claim 14 further including the step of the web site updating the order status byte in response to information received from at least one of vendors, buyers, couriers, and shippers.

16. The method of claim 15 further including the step of electronically debiting a buyer's bank account in response to at least one of the buyer placing an order and the buyer receiving an order.

17. The method of claim 15 further including the step of electronically crediting a vendor's bank account in response to at least one of the buyer placing an order from the vendor and the vendor shipping the order to the buyer.

18. The method of claim 15 further including the step of electronically crediting a vendor's bank account in an amount corresponding to at least one of the vendor shipping a partial order, the buyer receiving a partial order and the buyer refusing a portion of a shipped order.

19. The method of claim 15 further including the step of electronically debiting a buyer's bank account in an amount corresponding to at least one of the vendor shipping a

partial order, the buyer receiving a partial order and the buyer refusing a portion of a shipped order.

20. The method of claim 1 further including the steps of providing ordering and shipment tracking capabilities from a single integrated business-to-business website.

21. The method of claim 20 further including the step of programming the business-to-business website to automatically download information from a second website operated by or on behalf of a courier or shipping company.

22. The method of claim 21 further including the step of the business-to-business website accessing the second website, periodically and/or in response to a request, to retrieve information about a specified buyer order.

23. The method of claim 1 further including the step of the website automatically placing an order for a buyer in response to the buyer's inventory dropping below a predetermined threshold.

24. The method of claim 23 further including the step of, for each of a plurality of authorized vendor products, using an electronic inventory control system at the buyer's store or chain of stores to keep track of retail customer sales.

25. The method of claim 24 further including the step of the business-to-business website, on a repeated or periodic basis, comparing retail consumer sales against inventory to determine stock on hand.

26. The method of claim 25 further including the step of, in response to inventory or stock on hand dropping below a predetermined threshold, establishing a communications link between the electronic inventory control system and the business-to-business website, such that a product identifier and buyer identifier are received at the website.

5 27. The method of claim 26 further including the step of, in response to the receipt of a product identifier and a buyer identifier, the website automatically placing an electronic order for the authorized product from a vendor.

28. A method of doing business for use with an Internet-based, business-to-business web site, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) aggregating product information from each of a plurality of vendors into a common display format;

5 (b) in response to receiving identification information from a buyer, the web site sending the buyer a graphical user interface showing a list of departments or product categories for which the buyer is authorized to make purchases;

(c) upon receipt of a selection of a product category or department from the buyer, the web site sending the buyer a list of vendors that have authorized products corresponding to the selected department or category; and

(d) upon receipt of a selection of a vendor, the web site sending the buyer that vendor's list of approved products corresponding to the selected department or category.

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29. The method of claim 28 further including the step of the web site receiving the order from the buyer, wherein the order specifies a plurality of order parameters including the identity of the product and the quantity desired.

30. The method of claim 29 further including the step of the web site forwarding the order to the selected vendor for fulfillment.

31. The method of claim 30 further including the step of the web site receiving order tracking information pertaining to a tracking of shipment of the order from the vendor to the buyer.

32. The method of claim 29 further including the step of associating each of a plurality of buyers with a corresponding privilege level.

33. The method of claim 32 further including the step of the web site providing a super-administrative privilege level which allows an administrator to implement at least

one of acquisition, aggregation, analysis, and examination of data pertaining to a plurality of buyer and/or vendor transactions.

34. The method of claim 32 further including the step of the web site providing a first privilege level which allows the buyer to view the identities and descriptions of approved vendor products.

35. The method of claim 34 further including the step of the web site providing a second privilege level which allows the buyer to view identities and descriptions as well as price information.

36. The method of claim 35 further including the step of the web site providing a third privilege level which allows the buyer to view the orders and purchases of other buyers in the same product category or department.

37. The method of claim 36 further including the step of the web site providing a fourth privilege level which allows the buyer to view all orders and purchases made by all buyers at a given location or facility.

38. The method of claim 37 further including the step of the web site providing a fifth privilege level which allows the buyer to view all purchases made by all buyers at all facilities of a given buyer company.

39. The method of claim 31 further including the step of the web site assigning every buyer order a unique order number that includes information identifying the year, month, day, and hour that the order was placed.

40. The method of claim 39 further including the steps of assigning a first incoming order received during a particular year, month, day, and hour, a first sequence number, and the second incoming order received during this particular year, month, day and hour, a second sequence number.

41. The method of claim 40 further including the web site associating each order with a status byte indicative of whether the order is pending, cancelled, shipped full, shipped partial, back ordered, received full, received partial, refused full, or refused partial.

42. The method of claim 41 further including the step of the web site updating the order status byte in response to information received from at least one of vendors, buyers, couriers, and shippers.

43. The method of claim 42 further including the step of electronically debiting a buyer's bank account in response to at least one of the buyer placing an order and the buyer receiving an order.

44. The method of claim 42 further including the step of electronically crediting a vendor's bank account in response to at least one of the buyer placing an order from the vendor and the vendor shipping the order to the buyer.

45. The method of claim 42 further including the step of electronically crediting a vendor's bank account in an amount corresponding to at least one of the vendor shipping a partial order, the buyer receiving a partial order and the buyer refusing a portion of a shipped order.

46. The method of claim 42 further including the step of electronically debiting a buyer's bank account in an amount corresponding to at least one of the vendor shipping a partial order, the buyer receiving a partial order and the buyer refusing a portion of a shipped order.

47. The method of claim 28 further including the steps of providing ordering and shipment tracking capabilities from a single integrated business-to-business website.

48. The method of claim 47 further including the step of programming the business-to-business website to automatically download information from a second website operated by or on behalf of a courier or shipping company.

49. The method of claim 48 further including the step of the business-to-business website accessing the second website, periodically and/or in response to a request, to retrieve information about a specified buyer order.

50. The method of claim 28 further including the step of the website automatically placing an order for a buyer in response to the buyer's inventory dropping below a predetermined threshold.

51. The method of claim 50 further including the step of, for each of a plurality of authorized vendor products, using an electronic inventory control system at the buyer's store or chain of stores to keep track of retail customer sales.

52. The method of claim 51 further including the step of the business-to-business website, on a repeated or periodic basis, comparing retail consumer sales against inventory to determine stock on hand.

53. The method of claim 52 further including the step of, in response to inventory or stock on hand dropping below a predetermined threshold, establishing a communications link between the electronic inventory control system and the business-to-business website, such that a product identifier and buyer identifier are received at the website.

54. The method of claim 53 further including the step of, in response to the receipt of a product identifier and a buyer identifier, the website automatically placing an electronic order for the authorized product from a vendor.